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SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: MEPI -- MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE
IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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[1](#)D. KUWAIT 85 -- FREEDOM AGENDA: MOST SAY WOMEN
WON'T WIN BUT KUWAIT GEARING UP THEIR
ROLE IN 2007 ELECTIONS
[1](#)E. 05 KUWAIT 4325 -- MEPI-FUNDED REGIONAL CAMPAIGN
SCHOOL BRINGS ARAB WOMEN TOGETHER TO
STRENGTHEN THEIR POLITICAL SKILLS

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: More than half of the Kuwaiti women currently running for office, while different in their social, economic, and educational backgrounds, have in common their participation in a range of MEPI programs designed to strengthen the role played by women. The women campaigning on their behalf and encouraging women to vote are also MEPI program alumnae and several have administered MEPI small grants. Training and resources provided through MEPI and other programs have helped them to refine their skills and develop the confidence to speak out on political rights, highlight other areas of discrimination, and effectively challenge those who question the need for further reform. The success of Post's MEPI activities in the field of women's empowerment is due to the organic nature of the programs. Kuwaiti women have articulated what they need and program implementors spent considerable time meeting with activists and academics to tailor workshops accordingly. All small grant projects have a uniquely Kuwaiti flair and have been warmly received. The post-election period presents an opportunity to provide advanced training for those women already politically active and to work with women in the political arena. Post has already begun to poll its contacts on the type of training and events most needed and expects to pursue civic education activities and programs to help women work with elected officials. End summary.

MEPI A Common Theme among Politically Active Women

[1](#)2. (SBU) The 29 women still actively campaigning for the June 29 parliamentary elections represent a broad cross-section of Kuwaiti society. They range in age from 33 to 78; include several U.S. university graduates; are practitioners of both Sunni and Shi'a Islam and even include one atheist; have a wide range of educational and professional experience from high school graduates to post graduate education and professional degrees; come from urban

and rural areas; include married women and divorcees; and are veiled and unveiled. Despite these differences, however, the majority have one thing in common: training from MEPI-funded programs. Seventeen of the 29 have actively participated since May 23 in seminars, training, and one-on-one consultations with campaign experts provided by a MEPI grant to the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Many of these same women have participated in recent years in numerous MEPI programs in the political, economic, and women's pillars. In addition, several of their campaign managers, women's committee leaders for numerous male candidates, numerous speakers at election events, and many audience members are all MEPI-alumnae. Some candidates and campaign staff have also participated in International Visitor Program projects.

13. (C/NF) Three of the most prominent female candidates have long, established relationships with Post and MEPI programs. Dr. Rola Dashti, running for one of two seats against 19 other candidates (five of them women) in her district, has a distinguished relationship with MEPI. She has participated in a series of campaign schools and attended both MEPI and BMENA conferences. Through her various organizations, she has made prolific use of MEPI small grants, completing a gender budget study; conducting an opinion poll on women's political participation; and in the midst of her campaign, launching a new organization that in a matter of days revised and completed a MEPI small grant instructing women how and where to vote, where to seek assistance, and providing religious texts and the statements of religious leaders on why women should vote. Running against Dashti is former Assistant Undersecretary for Tourism Nabila Al-Anjari who took part in the September 2005 International Republican Institute- and NDI-sponsored "Partners in Participation" regional campaign school. Dr.

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Fatima Al-Abdali has also participated in MEPI-funded campaign training for women. All three candidates and their campaign managers, along with other Kuwaiti women, were scheduled to take part in the June advanced campaign academy, but understandably opted to remain in Kuwait and focus on their campaigns instead.

Don't Stop with Political Rights

14. (C/NF) The campaign staffs of many candidates have also benefited from training provided by the USG. Nadia Al-Sharrah has attended various political participation activities and is serving as Dashti's campaign manager and also consulting on the campaigns of former MPs Ahmed Al-Saadoun and Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager. Najat Al-Hashash, a veteran of the September 2005 program, is running women's outreach for former MP Abdulwahab Al-Haroun. On June 20, EmbOffs attended a special meeting he held for an audience of over 250 women, many of them past-participants in MEPI programs. He spoke at length on healthcare and education, issues brought to the forefront because of women's political participation (ref A). Many of the women came with a list of questions for him and one audience member and recent recipient of a MEPI small grant for women's leadership development, Dr. Samar Al-Roumi, told the women that receiving their political rights was not enough. Women needed enhanced social and civil rights and should only vote for MPs committed to full equality.

15. (C/NF) Likewise, many of the guest speakers at campaign tents are MEPI program graduates. Attorney Dr. Badria Al-Awadi, who took part in the November 2005 Arab Women's Legal Network in Jordan, delivered on June 20 an impassioned presentation on areas in the law that discriminate against women at the campaign headquarters of Marzouq Al-Ghanim, nephew of former parliamentary speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi who abstained during the May 16, 2005 suffrage vote. Al-Awadi joined the chorus instructing women not to support candidates who voted against women's rights and received cheers from the

audience when she named these candidates district by district. Al-Awadi also hosts a Thursday morning breakfast diwaniya frequented by several of the women running for office and their staffs as well as female EmbOffs. Other USG program participants delivering speeches and conducting seminars and campaign tents include Dr. Suad Al-Trarwah (IVP program "Promoting Rule of Law and Judicial Reform" and The Demos Institute Project Conference) and Dr. Kawthar Al-Jouan (IVP program "Promoting Effective NGO Leadership for Women," The Demos Institute Project Conference, and Partners in Participation). Even women from more conservative backgrounds are telling women to exercise their rights. Khawla Al-Ateeqi, who participated in the September 2005 workshop, told female voters, "You'll have to answer on judgment day if you don't vote."

16. (SBU) The Women's Cultural and Social Society, whose membership and leadership have taken part in MEPI programs, has also played an active and extremely effective role in an election awareness campaign. With a bit of a prod from Post and NDI's resident coordinator, the Society took the lead in producing brochures and posters to encourage women to vote and securing free air time for radio and TV public service announcements (ref A). EmbOffs visited June 20 three campaign events targeting women and at each location audience members had copies of the flyer.

After the Elections

17. (SBU) The U.S. can be proud of the assistance provided to Kuwaiti women who are uniformly appreciative of U.S. support and credit training programs for their successes. They praise the programs for helping them to further develop skills to compete with men, introducing them to successful Arab and western woman who inspired them to persevere, and not dictating how political reform and their participation should take shape in Kuwait. The strength of all Post programming in support of the political reform goal of the Freedom Agenda has been its ability to address needs identified by Kuwaiti partners. The post-election period, whether women and reformers are elected or not, presents an opportunity for additional programming, providing advanced training to women on how to work with elected officials and affect change and reaching out to the many women for whom the June 2006 campaign period was their first foray into politics. Recognizing that the most successful programs originated with Post's Kuwaiti contacts, EmbOffs have already begun to poll candidates and voters on what type of training

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is necessary to sustain the current high level of political interest and activism.

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